

# Mining a Poem for Meaning

- **Step #1:** As you read the poem, circle unfamiliar and/or important words, look up the meaning of words you don't know, and write the definition of the words in the margin.
- **Step #2:** Locate examples of poetic devices (*figurative language* and *musical devices*) and label them according to a color-code key that you create. Look for *figurative language* (e.g., hyperbole, imagery, metaphor, personification, simile, and symbolism) and *musical devices* (e.g., alliteration, assonance, consonance, meter, onomatopoeia, parallelism, and rhyme).
- **Step #3:** Analyze each stanza or small parts of the poem. Write your observations and interpretations in the margin next to the stanza or the part of the poem you analyze. Consider how diction and poetic devices affect mood, tone, and theme. Look for shifts in tone and point of view as well.
- **Step #4:** Summarize what you have discovered about the meaning of the poem.

Yes, poetry mining is hard work, but my friends and I have found many riches while mining poems. Join us and see what you can find!

A poem begins in  
delight and ends in  
wisdom! (Robert Frost)

The invariable mark of wisdom is to  
see the miraculous in the common!  
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Here on the pulse of this new day  
You may have the grace to look up and out . . .  
And say simply  
Very Simply  
With hope—  
Good morning! (Maya Angelou)

I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life!  
(Henry David Thoreau)



Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles!  
Nothing can bring you peace but yourself!  
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

I celebrate myself, and sing  
myself! (Walt Whitman)

I am monarch of all I survey!  
(Henry David Thoreau)

Whitman writes in free verse, which illustrates the freedom and liberty associated with the American experience.

# Walt Whitman

Whitman uses musical devices such as alliteration and parallelism to make his poem “melodious,” thus giving it a sense of unity despite its free-verse style.

One who works with stone or brick

Diverse; different

Carefree, amiable

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,  
5 The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,

Each person sings his own unique song.

The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,  
The wood-cutter’s song, the plowboy’s on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,

Strong, healthy, vigorous

Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,

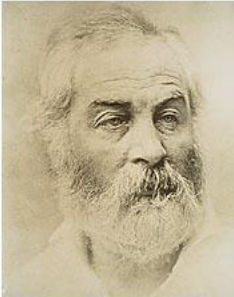
10 The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

Color Code  
Alliteration (Bold)  
Parallelism (Bold)  
Vocabulary (Bold)

At night, people come together to continue singing their songs, possibly to set aside differences.

## Summary

Whitman uses an extended metaphor to compare America to an orchestra. While each person, like each musician, sings his or her own song, plays his or her own instrument, a beautiful, melodious song is created in the end. In other words, each person contributes something unique to make America strong and keep America unified.



# Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before  
me,  
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide,  
and measure them,  
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much  
applause in the lecture room,  
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

# Walt Whitman

Sense of inactivity created by word choice (e.g., *heard* and *sitting*), parallel structure (like rows), and the use of passive voice (e.g., “were ranged” and “was shown”).

Notice the shift in diction and syntax, which signals a shift in tone, which possibly affects meaning!

When I **heard** the **learn'd astronomer**,

When the proofs, the figures, **were ranged** in columns before me,

When I **was shown** the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,

When I **sitting** **heard** the astronomer where he **lectured** with **much applause** in the **lecture room**,

Sense of imprisonment

How soon **unaccountable** I became **tired** and **sick**,

Till **rising** and **gliding** out I **wander'd** off by **myself**,

Active voice (e.g., “I wander'd” and “look'd”)

In the **mystical** moist night air, and from time to time,

**Look'd** up in **perfect silence** at the **stars**.

Sense of freedom and wonder

This poem places an emphasis on learning through personal experience and taking time to think and reflect in “perfect silence.” While the first stanza emphasizes passive learning, the second stanza emphasizes active leaning. It also has a romantic tone, emphasizing intuition and emotion over reason and logic, what can be perceived emotionally through instinct and intuition (the sixth senses) rather than what can be perceived physically through the five senses. The speaker’s mind definitely appears to have evolved from “third-rate” to “first-rate”!